

Congressman Rothman Questions Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

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CONTACT: Aaron Keyak office: (202) 225-5061 cell: (202) 905-6361 email: aaron.keyak@mail.house.gov (Washington, DC) – On Thursday, February 25, 2010, while testifying before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton answered questions from Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ), a member of that subcommittee. Congressman Rothman was focused on the threat of Pakistan's nuclear weapons falling into terrorist hands; relations between a nuclear-armed India and a nuclear-armed Pakistan; and recent incitement towards hatred of Jews and Israelis by various Palestinian religious leaders and government officials.

“As usual, Secretary of State Clinton was poised before our subcommittee and was extremely thoughtful in her answers. Preventing terrorists from acquiring any of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, improving relations between India and Pakistan to allow for cooperation in the global war on terror, and putting an end to incitement to hatred of Jews and Israelis are essential to achieving peace and stability in Central Asia and the Middle East,” said Congressman Rothman. “Secretary of State Clinton described, in some detail, her vision of a peaceful Central Asia that is stable and free from the threat of terrorism. The Secretary of State also spoke out strongly against Palestinian incitement toward violence. She also cited efforts made by Palestinian leaders to punish those guilty of hate and to foster a new era of tolerance and mutual respect among Palestinians and Israelis.”

The Secretary of State was appearing before the subcommittee to explain her Fiscal Year 2011 request for a total of \$56.6 billion – an 11 percent increase above the comparable Fiscal Year 2010 level. More than two-thirds of this increase is for diplomacy and development in the front-line states of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. The balance of the increase continues the rebuilding of civilian staff at the Department of State and USAID, and prioritizes three key issues: global health, climate change, and food security.

The Fiscal Year 2011 request to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations constitutes less than 1% of the request made by President Obama for the entire Fiscal Year 2011 federal budget.

Congressman Rothman with Secretary of State Clinton immediately following the hearing. Below are select portions of the transcript: Hearing of the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee, of the House Appropriations Committee subject: the Fiscal Year 2011 budget request for the Department of State.

REP. ROTHMAN: Thank you, Madame Chairman. Madame Secretary, it's always a great pleasure to see you. And let me say, from what we've seen so far, it is my opinion that you, that there has never been a more effective or smarter Secretary of State in the history of the United States than you, Madame Secretary.

SEC. CLINTON: Thank you.

REP. ROTHMAN: We are enormously proud of you and grateful for your service. You're indefatigable and you are extraordinarily effective for our country. Thank you. It's no secret that Pakistan possesses nuclear weapons. It is, I think, equally not a secret that if those Pakistani nuclear weapons were to fall into the hands of radical Islamic terrorists, that just before that happens, India probably would not -- would take steps to prevent that, which makes that region very volatile and makes relations between India and Pakistan so critical. So I'm interested in your view as to how their relations are these days. And does Pakistan understand, the military and the government, how unacceptable it would be and how catastrophic in terms of inviting a conflagration in the region, which would affect the world economy, et cetera, and millions of lives, if they were to not do what was necessary to prevent terrorists from overthrowing the government of Pakistan and acquiring Pakistani nuclear weapons?

SEC. CLINTON: Well, Congressman, that's an extremely important issue and it's one that we take as a very high priority in our efforts with both countries. We're heartened by the fact that they are resuming on a dialogue. They made progress in the last dialogue between then President Musharraf and Prime Minister Singh. It was suspended when Musharraf left office. It is now only being resumed. I think both countries realize that there are lots of important issues that only they can resolve between them, but the United States has encouraged the dialogue and we obviously hope that it will be productive. With respect to Pakistan's actions, we've been encouraged by the results of military and intelligence operations over the last several weeks that resulted in the capture and detention of some of the key members of the so-called Quetta Shurra, a very high ranking Taliban leader, right up there with Mullah Omar. We have also been encouraged by the Pakistani military's successful efforts to rout the Taliban from their own country, from Swat to North Waziristan, and we are working very closely with the government, both the democratically elected government and the military and ISI. But we believe that the people and government of Pakistan have, over the course of this past year, since I was last here, understood the direct threat to their state's survival posed by the extremists inside Pakistan, that it's not a problem for someone else, that they are operating out of Pakistan, that given the brutality and the horrific attacks launched mosques, markets, universities, volleyball games, police stations, ISI headquarters, this has been now seen for what it is -- a direct assault on the sovereignty and capacity of the Pakistan government. So I'm actually quite pleased to see the very vigorous response coming forth.

REP. ROTHMAN: And that is, I hate to use the work, this expression, trickle-down, because I normally don't accept that view, but the general population of Pakistan gets that, Madame Secretary?

SEC. CLINTON: It's our impression that, if that were not the case, the government and the military would not be proceeding, and –

REP. ROTHMAN: (Laughing.) May I just go on to –

SEC. CLINTON: Yes.

REP. ROTHMAN: One fast, sort of, question, but it is a powerful one, I think. We, the United States, the president's request in the Middle East includes \$400 million and economic assistance to strengthen the Palestinian Authority, as a credible partner in the Middle East peace and continue to respond to humanitarian needs in Gaza, \$400 million. The Palestinian Authority recently celebrated a birthday, the birthday of the Palestinian Authority, by naming a square in Ramallah in honor of the terrorists who killed 37 Israelis when that terrorist hijacked the bus in 1978. The Palestinian Authority Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, also honored a terrorist who just killed an Israeli by stabbing him through the window of his car, and went to pay a condolence call to his family, the murderer's family. The murderer's family. And finally in a sermon aired on Palestinian Authority television, on January 29 of 2010, an unnamed imam made hateful remarks, equating Jews with Nazis and saying that Jews are the enemies of the Palestinians and that the Jews must be killed. This is on Palestinian Authority television as recently as January 29, 2010. Can you, are you satisfied that the Palestinian Authority is, going to be a partner for peace with our number one ally in the region of the State of Israel at this stage, given what has just recently, and/or that the Palestinian Authority is taking the steps to end the incitement and the hatred and the incitement to murder that is just going on right with their consent, under their authority?

SEC. CLINTON: Well, the United States continues to reinforce to the Palestinian Authority leadership that all acts of incitement should be avoided and condemned, no matter when and where they happen. We consider incitement still to be a problem, but we believe that the situation is much better than it was in the past, and in light of that this past Friday, in response to the televised sermon that you were referencing, the Palestinian Authority immediately told the United States government that the speech was inconsistent with Palestinian leadership's support for a two state solution, that it did not represent the policies of the Palestinian Authority. And then this past Friday, a sermon promoting religious tolerance was delivered in all 1800 West Bank mosques by direction of the Palestinian Authority. So we see much greater sensitivity. We see fewer incidents of incitement. We still take every single one of them seriously.

REP. ROTHMAN: Thank you, Madame Secretary. Thank you, Madame Chairman.

The second round of questions from Congressman Rothman: REP. ROTHMAN: In one minute, Madame Secretary, will you tell the American people why, if they would like a safer world and don't want to invest, rightfully so -- or are reluctant to invest American men and women's blood in defending what needs to be defended overseas to protect our beloved United States of America. It's important to have diplomats and the resources for those diplomats.

SEC. CLINTON: Well, your question remind me of that famous saying by Winston Churchill. "Jaw-jaw is always better than war-war." You know, talk and talk and talk and talk and, sometimes, it tries the patience and it makes people crazy with, you know, frustration. But talking and diplomatic activity and engagement is far preferable to having to engage in war.

REP. ROTHMAN: At 1 percent of the budget.

SEC. CLINTON: Yes. That's right. REP. ROTHMAN: Thank you, Madame Secretary.

Another segment:

REP. CHANDLER: Thank you, Madame Chairman and Secretary Clinton. I'm going to get in line behind my colleagues and thank you for taking on what I believe is maybe the most difficult job that our country has to offer, and for handling it with great aplomb. I'm going to try to ask you a question that you may find simple, the answer, and you may find it very difficult. It's very broad, so you can handle it any way you want to. I think most of the American people believe that our main enemy in the world today is Islamic fundamentalism. We see it crop up in many different places. The Muslim world stretches, of course, in one form or another, from -- essentially from the Philippines all the way to Morocco. And it covers a very large swath of the human population on the planet. It seems like we see one fire after another breaking out in different parts of that world. Of course we've got the dramatic fire in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We deal with fires in Iraq; we deal with fires in the West Bank and Gaza and Israel, Yemen, Somalia, all sorts of places. And it seems to me that at any given time fires could break out anywhere and we have to deal with them. And that may just be the way it is, and it may be the best way to approach the problem. But I was wondering if you could give me a little bit of -- as concise an idea as you can about a broader strategy that our country is involved in to try to combat this problem overall. It's a very -- again maybe unnecessary way to combat it, to fight it country by country, but it's a broad problem that is very expensive when you do it that way and I'm wondering if the administration has a larger, more cogent plan to deal with this? SEC. CLINTON: Well, Congressman, I think that the president's vision of outreach to the Muslim World is really at the core of his strategic approach. There are more than a billion Muslims and the vast vast vast majority of them live peacefully, care about everything we care about from, you know, getting their kids off to a good start in life to finding a good job to taking care of their parents. I mean, it's a small but lethal group of extremists who pervert Islam for the purpose of seizing power, settling grievances, you know, imposing very strict rules on women and they do not reflect the vast majority of their fellow religious believers. And so when the president spoke in Cairo, it was to send a very clear message, we're not at war or we're not against Islam. We're not even against Islamic fundamentalism. I mean, people of different religions have different levels of belief. We are against terrorists and the use of terrorism to kill innocent people to intimidate and turn the clock back on the rights and opportunities that all people, particularly women, should be entitled to. So there are many aspects of our strategy following up on the president's vision. How we work in Indonesia is not how we work in Yemen. How we work in Pakistan may not be what we do in Senegal. And I think it is rooted in your question that we look at the full range of opportunities we have to strength, deepen and broaden our relationships with Muslim majority countries. And that is exactly what the president has in mind when he speaks about the American relationship with the Muslim world. You know, next month, he'll be going to Indonesia, a country that he knows well, and the country that has the largest Muslim population in the world. And I think that our goal is to demonstrate clearly that we are only focused on those extremists and terrorists who choose to pervert religion, who choose to pursue political gain and power in the cloak of religion, and that we will seek them out. We will find common cause with other countries to prevent them from gaining ground and finding safe haven to assault innocent people anywhere. ###